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'Cimarron' little bluestem

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'Cimarron' little bluestem

'Cimarron' little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium* Michx.) is a perennial warm-season bunchgrass. It can be used in mixtures of grasses and forbs for range seedings and in mixtures for seeding roadsides, embankments, and other plantings where native vegetation is desired.

Cimarron proved significantly better in forage production and disease resistance than other strains or cultivars in extensive trials over its expected range of adaptation.

It was cooperatively released to commercial seed producers in 1979 by the Soil Conservation Service and the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station.

Description

Cimarron is a tall, leafy composite of many strains of little bluestem from southwest Kansas and parts of Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma. Because Cimarron is a composite, it exhibits great variability in plant types. The color is characteristically blue-green.

Cimarron normally grows from 2 to 4 feet in height and produces small fluffy seeds (about 255,000 per pound), which ripen in the fall.

Adaptation

Cimarron little bluestem is an excellent cultivar for use in western and central Kansas, the Oklahoma and Texas Panhandles, eastern Colorado, and southwest Nebraska (see adaptation map). It has been grown where annual precipitation is as low as 12 inches. Performance has been good on all kinds of soils, except where high salinity, alkalinity, or excessive weed competition is a problem.

Establishment

Establish Cimarron by direct seeding in mixture with other native warm-season grasses and desirable forbs. The best time to plant is from March through the middle of May. The fluffy seed normally is planted with a native grass drill at a depth of one-fourth to three-fourths of an inch. The relative proportion of Cimarron in a native grass seeding may vary significantly with soil type, but generally does not exceed 20 to 25 percent of the total seeding mixture.

Severe weed competition can cause the planting to fail; therefore, you need to provide a weed-free, firm seedbed for planting. Be sure to prepare it far



enough in advance to ensure that all previous vegetation is killed. Grazing or mowing during the establishment year is not advised, except for weed control.

Management

Before grazing starts, allow the stand to become well established with plants 14 to 18 inches high. This usually is the second or third year. Rotational grazing is desirable. It will allow better utilization of the forage and more regrowth. If you use a rotational grazing system, remove the livestock when the plants are 4 to 6 inches tall. If you use continuous grazing, maintain a 6- to 8-inch stubble. Regardless of the method of grazing, allow 12 inches of regrowth before frost.

Commercial Seed Production

Cimarron little bluestem grows well under irrigation on light- to medium-textured soils. Plant 2 to 3 pounds of pure live seed per acre, placing the seed in rows on beds or beside shallow furrows so that you can irrigate without getting water directly on the rows before germination. For optimum seed production, space the rows about 3 feet apart. Row spacing can be adjusted to fit equipment needs.

On irrigated land only, apply 80 to 100 pounds of available nitrogen on established stands in spring. A color change in the seed heads and the beginning of seed shattering indicate the time to harvest the seed. An all-crop type of combine is satisfactory for harvesting the seed. Reduce the air to a minimum and operate the cylinder at high speed. Immediately after harvest, spread and dry the combined material or place it in a suitable grain dryer.

Availability

The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) maintains a foundation-seed production field at the Manhattan Plant Materials Center near Manhattan, Kansas. Foundation seed and information on producing certified

seed are available from your State Crop Improvement Association.

For more information on where to buy Cimarron little bluestem and how to use it and plant it, contact your local SCS office. It is listed in the telephone directory under U.S. Government, Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service.

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